

A
LETTER
TO
THE REVEREND
THE
PRESBYTERY OF TAIN,
ON THE
SUBJECT OF THE LAWS WHICH AFFECT THE
Roman Catholics,

BY
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A

LETTER,

&c. &c.

London, May 31, 1813.

GENTLEMEN,

I PERCEIVE by the public papers, that the Synod of Ross have agreed, with the exception of one dissenting voice, to petition Parliament against the measure of granting any further relief to the Roman Catholic inhabitants of these realms. Had I been present on that occasion, I should undoubtedly have stated my reasons for dissenting from that Petition. As I am very strongly convinced of the inexpediency of making this application

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to the Legislature, and as the Presbytery of Tain seem to have been unanimous in favour of the Petition, I think it proper to state to them in writing, what I should certainly, had it been possible, have said at the discussion in the Synod. Having had the honour of representing your Reverend Body in the General Assembly, I hope you will not deem this communication improper; for I am deeply impressed with the conviction that it is a duty which every man owes to his country, to endeavour to dissipate prejudices, which he is convinced are most injurious to its interests. Without any farther preface, I shall proceed with the subject.

In the very threshold of the question, it cannot fail striking every one, how ungracious a thing it is to petition against the freedom of any class of the community. Exclusion from civil offices is certainly a grievous restriction on freedom; and surely some very strong case indeed, one infinitely stronger than has been made out against the Catholics, can alone justify so odious a proceeding. If there

is one doctrine established in the constitutional law of Great Britain, it is this, that there is a strong presumption in favour of liberty. This, at least, had it been under the contemplation of the Synod, should have induced them to pause before they adopted the proposed motion. It should have occurred also, that Petitions against a full enjoyment of the civil privileges of the constitution, sound rather strangely from the inhabitants of any part of Scotland; for there are, to this day, a great number of offices from which, by law, all are excluded who refuse to take the Test Oaths and the Sacrament according to the forms of the Church of England. I admit that persons not qualifying in either of these ways, hold, by connivance, offices from which they are excluded by law; and that an annual Indemnity Act relieves them from any apprehension of the legal consequences of their omission. But I ask you, is it fit that the inhabitants of such a kingdom as Scotland, should now hold offices, in the southern part of the island, by conni-

vance; and only escape the pains of law under the broad shelter of an Indemnity Act. I cannot understand, that persons whose Established Church labours under legal disabilities, arising and continued from the same source as those of the Catholics, should petition against the enlargement of the privileges of one class of their fellow sufferers. The source from which this exclusion, differing indeed in extent, but allied in principle, proceeds, is the Church of England's jealousy;—I should rather say that of a part of the Church of England, for I would, by no means, be understood to assert, that a majority even of its Clergy are unfavourable to religious liberty. To present Petitions against the present Catholic Bill appears to be peculiarly impolitic on the part of the Scotch Presbyterians, because should they petition for a removal of the legal disabilities, by which they are affected, an answer not unapt may be made to them, which is, that they who objected to the grant of relief to the Catholics, could not refuse assent to the apprehensions

entertained of their own intentions by the leading members of the Church of England. So true it is, that intolerance often arms others against its own professors. When I say intolerance, I am under the necessity of stating my opinion that the measure of toleration granted to the Catholics is very deficient. I can hardly concede, that toleration is complete when penalties (for disqualification is, in fact, a penalty) are permitted to attach to those who are of a particular religious persuasion. For myself, I may say, that I should reckon it a very severe penalty to be disqualified from sitting in Parliament, and from holding a great variety of offices. I also feel, that to be compelled to qualify for an office by complying with religious ceremony, to which I am unaccustomed, or to enjoy immunity from prosecution, only by the clauses of an Indemnity Act, would be a very considerable hardship. Following the good rule of judging of the feelings of others by my own, I affirm that, in respect to the Protestant Dissenters, toleration is not quite complete; and with respect to

the Catholics it is very deficient. How can I imagine, that the Catholics should not consider the present system as an oppressive one? It is out of nature that they should be satisfied with it. Have they not evinced their solicitude concerning its removal?

I have stated, that I think the grievances of the Catholics very heavy. I shall now state the leading views, from which I deduce the conclusion that they should be abolished. But I would expressly guard you from imagining, that I am of opinion that these disqualifications should be taken away, without obtaining reasonable securities as to any attempts on the Constitution. Here too, I must explain, that this opinion is not founded on any doubt of the loyalty of the Catholic body; but because these securities appear necessary to satisfy the apprehensions of many well-meaning persons in both parts of the island; while they evince a readiness on the part of the Catholics to concede to every thing not against their consciences, to the great cause of harmony and conciliation. Securities I

would certainly demand; but not such as would be either insufficient, as they concern the state, or degrading as they relate to the Catholic. Still I am aware, that the measure of removing the disabilities which affect the Catholics, constitutes in itself the greatest security which the wit of man can devise; for by admitting them into the full enjoyment of the advantages and immunities of the Constitution, you give a motive for its preservation, much stronger than any other that can be conceived. When that is done, by overturning the Constitution, they would in reality overthrow the system from which they derive their importance—their security—the objects which gratify their ambition, and call forth their talents. Without very considerable leaders, no important revolution was ever effected; and no better security for any government can exist, than enlisting all the wealth and talent which it contains in its service, under the banners of their own interests.

So much on the question of security.—
 I am not discussing the question in its details, therefore, I shall proceed to its other features, merely premising, that I mean to give a sketch only of the subject as it has occurred to me, and not to enter into a very full discussion of all its separate parts. It will hardly be necessary for me to mention here, that I feel no peculiar predilection either for the doctrines, or the ceremonial of the Church of Rome. I consider the reformation as the most important event in modern history; itself an offspring of the revival of learning, and re-acting with extraordinary force on its first cause, promoting incalculably the diffusion of that knowledge from which it originated. I believe that the progress of enlightened views has operated very considerably on every religion, and certainly with no inconsiderable influence on that of the Catholics. Of this assertion, what can be a greater proof, than that many of them now allow their children to be educated indiscrimi-

nately with Protestants at Mr. Lancaster's schools?—and that societies are actually forming for the distribution of the Scriptures among the Catholic population. These are encouraging facts; they speak for themselves; what effects they may produce upon the doctrines or ceremonial of the Church of Rome, is a speculation on which I shall not enter; but they are enough to shew what a spirit of liberality has grown up among the Catholics, not exceeded, and in many instances not equalled, by Members of the established Church of England. It is a fact, with which perhaps you may be unacquainted, that many of the clerical members of that very respectable establishment have a strong repugnance to the distribution of the Scriptures among the lower classes, unaccompanied by any comment belonging to the Church of England. An analogous objection accounts for the aversion of some of the English clergy to Mr. Lancaster's very admirable system of education. The Church of England therefore is equalled, certainly, in

point of liberality by the Roman Catholic Church of the British Isles.

It is not, however, as a religious question that I mean to consider this subject, but as a political one, in which, it is true, certain doctrines imputed to the Catholics enter.

The question, which cannot be evaded or postponed, is simply this: Are we to continue at least four millions of our fellow subjects under a system of exclusions, of which they loudly complain? This body contains many individuals of great wealth, of eminent talents, of the most perfect integrity, and the most tried loyalty. This body forms by far the greater part of the population of Ireland. The fate of such a body of men cannot be unimportant. Its numbers and its weight must be either ranged against this country, or they must remain in sullen silence a clog upon the energies of the nation; and troops, which might otherwise be employed in succouring our allies, or in protecting our colonies, must be kept to overawe the suppressed, and natural discon-

tent of an oppressed people. Another alternative, and only one, remains ; that you should turn them to incalculable advantage, by removing all their disabilities ; at the same time promoting the happiness of the inhabitants, and consolidating the general strength of the British empire. This is the way, in which the great problem respecting the treatment of this body, in my opinion, should be solved. In the first place, it is obvious that the unfettered talent of four millions of men must be an immense accession to the moral strength of the nation. A greater portion of their time and application would be devoted to the service of the public than it can possibly be at present ; they would not only have much greater inclination to serve the public, but they would then have much greater opportunity. Opportunity would of course engender inclination, and by their reaction much benefit would no doubt be produced. By adding new motives of exertion, greater efforts would be made, and, of course, much greater talents in many walks of pub-

life would be developed—talents which now remain either dormant, or are employed on objects of inferior utility, merely on account of the disqualifying statutes. To range a mass of talent on the side of the Constitution, which before was neutral or hostile, to call into action abilities which slumbered, and to direct to objects of utility those hitherto misapplied, are surely objects not unworthy the attention of the Legislature. This is one view to which I beg to call your particular attention. If this reasoning be correct in general, it is peculiarly so at the present moment. The country is engaged in a war with a very considerable part of Europe, as well as with the United States of America. It requires no very minute information to know, that our principal deficiency in this contest arises from our very limited population. Should we not, then, endeavour to avail ourselves fully of the utmost advantages which the whole of it can afford? It is inconceivable, that men of all classes of the Catholics, should not be backward in entering the regular army,

when they know that they can never obtain an important command. Human nature looks forward to bettering its condition. The passion of honest ambition must be dead in the bosoms of those, who are insensible to the objects which I have alluded to. But is this cold, passive indifference to fame and honour a characteristic of the natives of Ireland? Who will say so? If then the Irish are men of high minds, as well as of dauntless hearts, how can we imagine that they will be ready to enter into a service under such disadvantages? In the profession of arms these considerations operate with incalculable force. How can it be said that this is not a view of importance, sufficient, at the present time especially, to cause wise men to hesitate, before they place any impediment in the way of an alteration of the present system?

The war which has been waging in Spain for so long a space, afforded a peculiarly favourable field for bringing into action the Catholic peasantry of Ireland, as well as those of a higher rank in life.

This is not the place to examine the details of a plan for this purpose ; but it is obvious, that a Government who had adopted a conciliatory policy with regard to them, might have possessed important facilities in recruiting our forces in the Peninsula. What is very singular, to me unaccountable, is, that some of those who were loudest against the Catholics, appeared most sanguine in the Spanish cause. It only remains for us to lament, that their zeal was neutralized by their prejudices.

In the great and honourable profession of the law, the same principles apply which I have already mentioned. In truth, the principle of honour, of aspiring after official rank as part of the reward of the life of active exertion, is one still stronger, and unquestionably more refined, than the desire of an opportunity of amassing a fortune. To be excluded from filling the high offices of the law, and of aspiring to the bench, is apt to make those only become lawyers who make the bar a trade rather than a profession.

That the professional men of by far the largest class of the nation should be excluded from all official rank, is an evident grievance, tending to debase the bar, and deprive the subjects of the legal assistance of many men of high characters and great abilities. That the Legislature should be deprived of the assistance of a proportion of Catholic representatives, is, I conceive, a national misfortune; and, no doubt, is a great hardship upon every class of the Catholic body. But I will not pursue the argument, on this part of the question, any farther.

By removing the Catholic disabilities, you destroy a system, under which the natives of Ireland, sent into foreign services, gained those honours abroad which their valour merited, and shed that blood which they would have been proud to have expended in the cause of their native country, in fighting the battles of Austria, of France, and of Spain,—a system which, forcing the young Catholics to find in foreign countries opportunities of education, from which they were

excluded at home, did not, it may be supposed, either contribute to enlarge their minds or confirm their loyalty at St. Omers, Louvain, or Salamanca. This last grievance, it is but fair to add, has been partly removed by the establishment at Maynooth. But, till the Catholic youth are as freely admitted into Trinity College, Dublin, as they are into the University of Edinburgh, the evil will not be completely remedied.

The state of Ireland must strike every intelligent mind as extremely anomalous. Three-fourths of the population were formerly considered in the light of a degraded, suspected, a disloyal, an almost proscribed race. These dreadful times have passed away, but the effects of that code still remain; the dying embers of a system, which had well nigh consumed the best part of that unfortunate country. It is not in human nature, that the Protestant should not consider himself as a superior person to the Catholic. Even when superiority is founded upon the admitted distinctions of rank, talents, or experience,

it is but borne with difficulty by the proud and high-spirited ; but when it really consists only, in professing a more highly favoured creed; it becomes intolerable to the meekest minds. Much penetration is not required to discover what heart-burnings and jealousies such a state of things must have produced ; for a more deplorable condition of society, it is impossible for imagination to conceive, than that in a country torn by religious animosities, where the dominant party forms not one-third of the whole population. I will put it seriously to every man, whether he ought not to rejoice, should the remains and residue of this frame of things be done away. If this was accomplished, could we shut our eyes to the accession of happiness that must be diffused over the whole kingdom? And will any man deny that, this alone forms a very strong argument in favour of the measure.

Having stated an outline of some of the chief advantages, which appear to me to be necessarily connected with grant-

ing relief to the Catholics, I am well aware that another question yet remains for investigation, which is, Can the relief alluded to, be granted, in consistency with the safety of the existing establishments? I think it can: and I shall now proceed to state the grounds of my opinion. Some of these I have already mentioned, and shall not now repeat. But I shall give you my reason for believing, that there is not enough of weight in the objections usually stated to Catholic relief, to induce wise men to hazard the certain advantages of which the measure would be productive. Before proceeding, however, to the most important of these, I cannot avoid making a few remarks on the manner in which the controversy has been conducted in the southern part of the island. For, not to mention the disingenuous reasonings, and inapplicable statements concerning persecution, and the Inquisition (which, by the bye, is now abolished, even in Spain), and the gross and vulgar expedients used to

in flame the lowest, and most illiterate rabble, disgraceful impostures have been employed to throw discredit upon the cause of the Catholics. Living as you do at such a distance from the British metropolis, and not, perhaps, having access to the daily papers, you may be ignorant of them.

I shall quote two instances which are matters of notoriety, and have been undeniably established.—A pamphlet, called the Third Part of the Penal Laws which aggrieve the Catholics, was published, purporting to be a production under the authority of the Catholic Board. This was circulated with great industry, quoted at County Meetings, its contents had great weight in many places; yet this publication was an audacious forgery of some enemy to Catholic Emancipation, and was most solemnly denied by their Board in Dublin. Base as this cheat was, till it was formally contradicted, and till the deceit was proved beyond the possibility of controversy, it produced, in

many places, a considerable sensation against the Catholics.

Another stratagem resorted to for the same purpose, was framing a protest, and inserting it in a Dublin journal, purporting to be a protest against the Bill now pending in Parliament. I shall quote the contradiction, from authority, that has been inserted in the papers.

“ At a meeting of the Catholic Board
 “ held in Capel-street, on Saturday the
 “ 8th of May, 1813,—

“ Sir EDWARD BELLEW in the chair :

“ Resolved unanimously,—That a publication in the Dublin Journal newspaper of this day, purporting to be a Protest of the Catholic Board of Ireland against the Bill now pending for the relief of His Majesty’s Roman Catholic subjects, is a gross and mischievous fabrication, and (like a recent forgery of the Third Part of the Penal Laws which aggrieve the Catholics of Ireland,

“ issuing from the hired press, and from
 “ the office of the above-mentioned print)
 “ is calculated to excite animosity, and
 “ hatred against the Catholic People of
 “ Ireland.

“ EDWARD BELLEW, Chairman,

“ WILLIAM FRANCIS FINN, Sec^y.”

I shall only add, to the enumeration of these shameless impostures, that at one of the County Meetings (Flintshire, I believe) an impression was made by reading the oaths actually taken by the Catholics, and representing that they *refused* to take them. I by no means assert that many may not entertain doubts upon the propriety of passing the Bill, nay, that they may be clearly against it; but I am entitled, from the instances I have quoted, and the innumerable others which might easily be found, that much of the opposition proceeds from mere party spirit, and serious charges are often urged contrary to the conviction of those who prefer them. I know, indeed, that I am addressing a body of men who would

revolt from the use of artifices such as these; but I stated them, to shew the means, by which so great an apparent opposition has been excited to the Catholic Bill.

I now have to proceed to a short view of the objections. The first is, the doctrine attributed to the Catholics, that no faith is to be kept with heretics. Now, in answer to this, I affirm, that whatever might have been the doctrines of the Councils of Constance, Lateran, or Trent, such a tenet cannot fairly be said to belong to the Catholics of the present day. Look to the answers of the Catholic Universities on this, and on the subject of the temporal influence of the Pope. Just recollect that this doctrine is solemnly and universally denied by the Catholics, and then ask yourselves if it be possible, at this period, and in the British Islands, that any body of men can maintain such a pernicious doctrine. But I would call your attention to a more familiar view of the question; for I appeal to your experience, and the experience of every man,

whether, in common life, you would distrust the honour, or the word of any one, merely because he happened to be a Catholic. I am persuaded, that very few will be found, even in Ireland, so bigotted as to assert, that in practice he carries his opinion of Catholic perfidy to such a length. But if no one can be found, who acts upon this imputation, are we not to conclude that its very assertors do not believe it. I may also hint, that we are currently in the habit of making treaties with Catholic powers—treaties which it is very obvious would be perfectly nugatory, did we really believe that Catholics were not trust-worthy in their transactions with Protestants. I never heard, or read that, during the last century at least, they were more given to the violation of treaties than nations belonging to the Reformed Faith. The bounds to which I prescribe myself, undoubtedly prevent me from pursuing a long historical induction; but I firmly believe that the proposition is true. Why do we treat with Spain?—why have had so long and intimate connection with

Portugal, each court tolerably rigid in the Catholic Faith, if we seriously believed them incapable of being bound by the provisions of a public instrument? Is it true or false, that our countrymen reside in these countries, pursue their mercantile concerns, or make journeys of curiosity, without any annoyance whatever?

Leaving these facts, and the inferences they suggest, I now come to the assertion, that the Pope has a right of granting to the Catholics an unlimited right of perjury. Now, on the absolving power many observations, each quite conclusive, may be offered. First, I would observe, that it is delicacy concerning an oath, which prevents the Catholics from enjoying all they claim. This is quite unanswerable; for, if they were so regardless of that sacred obligation, how is it possible that, with so many motives to tempt them, they have invariably refused to take any oath which is pointed against them and their religion? Secondly, if it be credited that they are not to be believed on oath, why has the Legislature, by the Acts of 1791 and 1793,

granted them some relief, on their taking certain oaths prescribed by these Acts? If the Houses of Parliament enacted these statutes under the impression that the Catholics cared little for perjury, they framed nugatory laws; and betrayed their trust, by accepting what purported to be securities from the Catholics, when they very well knew, they were no securities whatever. Thirdly, I would remark, that I know of no legal objection to testimony in a court of law arising from the witness being a Catholic. I never heard that any counsel dared to hint at such an objection, I will not say to the admissibility, but to the credibility of any person on that ground. If, then, the property and the life of the Protestant inhabitants of these realms depend as much on the testimony of the Catholic as on that of the Protestant, I would seriously and solemnly call upon you to give a reason, why any doubt should be thrown on the integrity of the same individuals, when oaths relating to the state are administered to them. You believe them in courts of

law—you believe them when they take the oaths imposed in 1791 and 1793—and why will you not believe them on an oath which they are ready to take in 1813? If you do believe them, when they take the last oath, there is an end of the question, for it contains every imaginable security an oath is capable of affording.

Some argument has been raised upon the proceedings of the Catholics in former ages—the persecutions which they roused, and the massacres which they perpetrated. To me, however, it does not seem either a useful, or a pleasing task to enter into a dilated examination of those revolting scenes; or to advert to the instances of the same description, with which those professing the Reformed Religion may be justly charged. It would not tend to conciliate, to recall to our recollection what must inspire every humane mind with mingled feelings of humiliation, astonishment, and horror. But it is unnecessary to mention this part of the subject, except to shew that it is wholly inapplicable to the present question. In what country, I

would enquire, does persecution for religious opinions now exist?—where is it to be found? I answer, no where. I call upon the opponents of the Catholics to point out the spot where it any longer remains. And if I were called upon to name the place where it lingered the longest—if obliged to name the code in which it last disgraced a Christian country, I would boldly answer—Ireland, and its Penal Code.

If, however, the spirit of persecution has been extinguished, even in countries in which it might be exercised much more easily than in Great Britain, is it possible to conceive that, by the admission of a small proportion of Catholics into the Protestant Legislature, four or five millions of men would obtain such an ascendancy over eleven or twelve millions, as to allow the minority to introduce a system of religious persecution against the majority? To maintain seriously such an opinion, is to advance what hardly admits of a serious answer. Men are tolerably quick-sighted in these mat-

ters; and as Catholics have been once excluded, so they would again, and most justly, if they attempted thus to abuse the privileges which we now propose to concede to them. Nothing, therefore, can be more unjust than to exclude Catholics from the full benefit of the Constitution, because some of their Church persecuted formerly; or more chimerical than to apprehend, that their admission to these benefits would make them persecutors in future. The question is, not what was the conduct of all religious sects, when so many circumstances united in exasperating their mutual animosities; but what is the conduct of all sects, now that these circumstances no longer disgrace mankind. That the Catholics possessing the power of defending those establishments which the Reformation menaced, should have abused it in many instances; and, that in those comparatively dark ages, they should have considered persecution as a ready means of recalling the Reformers from their supposed errors, is by no means wonderful. There is, however, no ground

for imagining that a practice so odious, so ineffectual, so universally condemned, and so entirely abandoned, will hereafter be renewed. There, consequently, is not the slightest occasion for pursuing this branch of the question at any greater length.

The next subject of observation shall be, the foreign influence of the Pope, and his subserviency to Buonaparte. Now I should answer, that the best way of combatting foreign influence was, by increasing the motives of any class of men to feel a strong attachment to their own country. But, secondly, it must strike every one, who knows any thing of the subject, that Buonaparte would never recognise a power in the Pope to dethrone any Sovereign, whether Catholic or Protestant. At the beginning of the last century even, Louis XIV. never admitted this power to reside with the Pope; and it is not easy to imagine that Buonaparte will recognise a principle which, in a change of circumstances, might, with great effect, be used against his own authority. That this is his policy, and that he will never deviate

from it, may be inferred from his conduct towards Spain. No nation can be pointed out in which the authority of the Pope could have more weight; yet the Juntas, or the Regency, or the Clergy who adhered to them, were never threatened with any censure of the Church. Had he conceived that it was expedient to resort to such assistance, there was nothing which could have prevented him. The Pope was in his power, and must have signed whatever was put before him. From the vigilance of the guard, no communication of the force used to compel his signature could have been made. If the Pontiff was obstinate, he could have been removed by means not unfamiliar to the Ruler of France; and a more complying one substituted in his stead. Viewing the termination of the war in Spain as an object of the greatest importance to the French Emperor; considering that Spain was a country, in which the influence of the Pope must be held more extensive than in any other country of Europe; and seeing that he had the means in his possession of using

that influence to any extent he pleased—how is it possible to believe that he will hereafter exercise it in a country in which from so many reasons, success from that quarter must be so much more hopeless? The Ruler of France trusts to his political and military measures, and does not encourage the Clergy to hold themselves of consequence in accomplishing his schemes of aggrandisement. We must have very good evidence to induce us to believe, that Buonaparte is about to pursue a system diametrically opposite to that of all Catholic Sovereigns for more than a century, and equally inconsistent with his own practice heretofore.

A proposition of a different nature may be urged against the Catholics. It may be said, that if we grant them the same privileges as other subjects, we at least deprive them of one inducement for joining the Reformed Church. I do not mean, that the view of temporal advantage would be sufficient to convert them; for of the value of such a nominal conversion no estimate is too low; but that a considera-

tion of these advantages would induce them to give a greater attention to the controverted points; than they had hitherto bestowed upon them; and that the superior excellence of the Reformed Faith would undoubtedly cause a great secession from that of the Church of Rome. Still it appears to me that much weight is not to be given to this argument. As long as men have any particular and exclusive privileges, or as long as they labour under particular and exclusive disabilities, there is often a sort of corporation spirit which connects them together, and which it is extremely difficult to dissolve. It must also be recollected, that if the change of faith is accompanied by evident temporal advantages; the world in general will rather attribute it to them, than to any conviction, however sincere, on the part of the convert. The bad motives which may be imputed, however unjustly, may cause many persons to refrain from joining the Protestant Church; for we must admit that it requires considerable strength of mind to withstand, at once, the scorn of those

whose faith you have abandoned, as well as the sneers and insinuations of those, whose communion you join. I think, therefore, that there is a much greater chance of making converts from the Catholics after, than before granting their Petition. If, then, we conscientiously believe, that the happiness of the people of Ireland would be essentially promoted by the conversion of the Catholics, I think there is every reason to be confident, that the policy which I have taken the liberty to recommend, would conduce to that end.

As to the danger to the Church Establishment, and to the Protestant Succession, I have to remark, that the proportion of Catholics in Parliament must always continue so small, as not to leave the least ground of apprehension on such a subject. The representative must bear a proportion to the numbers and wealth of the constituent body. The present proportion of the wealth, and numbers of the Catholics is such as, to remove any danger from that source. Why, then, shall we distress ourselves by apprehensions of in-

jury, in the highest degree improbable, and overlook the attainment of advantages as great, as they are certain? Unless a wonderful change takes place in the proportion to which I have referred, and an immense number of Protestants become Catholics—a supposition, you will allow, highly improbable—the question is not a matter of doubt to those, whose judgments are not warped by incurable prejudices. Probability, however, must guide us here as in all political discussions; and if we apply this rule of judgment, the dispute is at an end.

There is another view, too, in which it seems to me obvious that the Church Establishment would be benefited by the measure. Nothing could add to the stability of the whole empire, without adding, in a relative degree, to the security of the Established Church. If, then, the tendency of the measure is to consolidate the strength of the whole empire, by knitting together its several parts, I cannot perceive, that a portion of the increased security should not accrue to the Esta-

lished Protestant Churches of England and Scotland. Indeed, it seems to me very clear that, in a particular manner, the measure of the removing the Catholic disabilities must operate in strengthening these Establishments; for by it, a numerous and formidable body of men would be deprived of very strong motives for wishing to effect their humiliation, if not their entire destruction. The subject has often presented itself to me in this view, and I am not without hopes, that it will be found solid when it is subjected to the test of experience.

Having shortly hinted at various answers to the most plausible of the objections to granting the Catholics the full enjoyment of the Constitution, I will only advert to a sort of reasoning that some make use of. It is said, that the measure may be a wise, and a constitutional one; but, from the conduct of the Catholics themselves, this is not the proper time for adopting it. In reply to this reasoning, I might suggest, that if the measure will

prove generally beneficial it would be irrational to sacrifice the interests of the community, merely because the Catholics had behaved with impropriety. But I deny most firmly that, as a body, they have been in the least degree disrespectful to the Legislature, or disloyal to the Sovereign. There have been, no doubt, some intemperate speeches spoken by several of them—speeches which gave greater pain to no class of His Majesty's subjects than to the Catholics, and their friends. What, however, are we to do? Is there any degree of sense or justice in punishing a whole body, whose deportment has not only been irreproachable but exemplary, for the rash, intemperate, but unauthorised expressions of a few of its members? On the subject of the moderation, and propriety displayed by the Catholics, next to the evidence of their conduct, their resolutions, and their petitions to the Houses of Parliament, I would refer to the testimony of Lord Castlereagh, who has repeatedly declared

his satisfaction in viewing the moderate and conciliating conduct of the Catholic body.

Before concluding, I may call upon you to recollect, that the measure of granting the proposed relief to the Roman Catholic, is not a new or crude idea; it has undergone discussion both in, and out of Parliament, to a degree nearly unprecedented, and no doubt as to the ultimate result of that discussion can be entertained; the numbers in favour of emancipation having infinitely increased. Doubts have been solved, and prejudices removed, to an incalculable extent: nay, its firmest opponent, the Earl of Liverpool, admitted, in the House of Lords, that the question was now much narrowed.

It, besides, is satisfactory to know, that so extensive a political measure has been approved of, in principle, by the greatest statesmen who have lived since it was agitated. The names of Burke, of Pitt, of Fox, of Windham, afford a strong sanction to its safety, and consistency with the preservation of the Constitution.

And can we really draw any comparison between the wisdom of those great men and that of the opponents of the measure? It would be invidious; and I shall not attempt it. A comparison between the mass of constitutional knowledge, splendid eloquence, liberality of sentiment, and statesman-like sagacity, at present arrayed on the side of the Catholics, with the portions of these qualities possessed by its opponents, would be little more to the advantage of the latter. A measure so mature, so recommended, I can hardly bring to imagine could be dangerous. For the other reasons I have given my conviction is, that it would not only be safe, but of the highest benefit to every part of this great empire.

I have trespassed at some length on your patience, but the importance of the question, and my anxiety to prevent any one from supposing, that I could have concurred in the vote of the Synod, have induced me to convey my sentiments to you at so much length. If what I have said, shall have the effect of

inducing any of the Presbytery to reconsider their opinions, or if it shall have removed any prejudices of those, into whose hands it may fall, I shall feel amply repaid for the trouble of this Letter.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient servant,

RODERICK MACLEOD.

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APPENDIX.

MR. GRATTAN'S *Bill, which has been so studiously misrepresented as overturning the Constitution in Church and State, admits no Catholic to Office who does not take the following Oath:*

“I, *A. B.* do hereby declare, That I do profess the Roman Catholic Religion; and I do sincerely promise and swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George the Third, and Him will defend, to the utmost of my power, against all conspiracies and attempts whatever, that shall be made against His person, crown, or dignity; and I will do my utmost endeavour to disclose and make known to his Majesty, his Heirs and Successors, all treasons and traitorous conspiracies, which may

be formed against Him or them; and I do faithfully promise to maintain, support, and defend to the utmost of my power, the Succession of the Crown, which Succession, by an Act intituled, ‘ An Act for the further Limitation of the Crown, and the better securing the Rights and Liberties of the Subject,’ is and stands limited to the Princess Sophia, Electress and Dutchess Dowager of Hanover, and the heirs of her body being Protestants; hereby utterly renouncing and abjuring any obedience or allegiance unto any other person, claiming or pretending a right to the Crown of this Realm: I do declare, that I do not believe that the Pope of Rome, or any other foreign prince, prelate, state, or potentate, hath or ought to have any temporal or civil jurisdiction, power, superiority, or pre-eminence, directly or indirectly, within this Realm: I do further declare, that it is not an article of my faith, and that I do renounce, reject, and abjure, the opinion that princes excommunicated by the Pope or Council, or by the Pope and Council, or by any authority

of the See of Rome, or by any authority whatsoever, may be deposed or murdered by their subjects, or any person whatsoever: I do swear, that I will defend to the utmost of my power, the settlement and arrangement of property within this Realm, as established by the Laws: I do swear that I do abjure, condemn; and detest, as unchristian and impious, the principle, that it is lawful to destroy or anyways injure any person whatsoever, for or under the pretence of such person being a Heretic: I do declare solemnly before God, that I believe that no act, in itself unjust or immoral, can ever be justified or excused by or under any pretence or colour, that it was done either for the good of the Church, or in obedience to any Ecclesiastical power whatsoever: I also declare, that it is not an Article of the Roman Catholic Faith, neither am I thereby required to believe or profess, that the Pope is infallible; or that I am bound to obey any order in its own nature immoral; though the Pope or any Ecclesiastical power should issue or direct such

order; but, on the contrary, I hold that it would be sinful in me to pay any respect or obedience thereto: I further declare; that I do not believe; that any sin whatsoever committed by me can be forgiven; at the mere will of any Pope or of any Priest, or any person or persons whatsoever; but that sincere sorrow for past sins, a firm and sincere resolution to avoid future guilt, and to atone to God; are previous and indispensable requisites to establish a well-founded expectation of forgiveness; and that any person, who receives absolution without these previous requisites, so far from obtaining thereby any remission of his sins, incurs the additional guilt of violating a sacrament: I do reject and detest, as an unchristian and impious principle, that faith is not to be kept with heretics or infidels: I do hereby disclaim, disavow and solemnly abjure any intention to subvert the present Church Establishment, for the purpose of substituting a Roman Catholic Establishment in its stead: I do solemnly swear, that I will not use any privilege,

power, or influence, which I do now or may hereafter possess, to overthrow or disturb the present Church Establishments of the United Kingdom; and that I never will, by any conspiracy, contrivance, or device whatsoever, abet others in any attempt to overthrow or disturb the same; and that I will make known to His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, all attempts, plots or conspiracies, whether at home or abroad, which shall come to my knowledge, for effecting either of these purposes: I do solemnly in the presence of God, profess, testify and declare, that I do swear this Oath and make this Declaration, and every part thereof, in the plain and ordinary sense of the words, without any evasion, equivocation or mental reservation whatever; and without any dispensation already granted by the Pope, or any authority of the See of Rome, or any person whatever; and without thinking that I am or can be acquitted before God or man, or absolved of this Declaration, or any part thereof, although the Pope or any

other person or authority whatsoever, shall dispense with or annul the same, or declare that it was null and void from the beginning.

“So help me GOD.”

Let it be recollected, that Catholics prove their scrupulous observance of Oaths by not taking those which would *now* admit them to Power and Office, merely because they are irreconcilable with their religious opinions ; and then let every Protestant ask himself whether the man who takes and observes the preceding Oath can be an enemy to the Church or State, or a bad subject of His Majesty.

FINIS.